



2025 State of the State Address – Securing Missouri’s Future
Governor Mike Kehoe
January 28, 2025

Thank you, Lieutenant Governor, Mr. Speaker, statewide officials, Judges of the Missouri Supreme Court, members of the General Assembly, esteemed guests, and my fellow Missourians.

I am proud to be welcomed to the dais for the first time as the Governor of the State of Missouri, joined by someone who has been by my side for 35 years—my wife and the First Lady of Missouri, Claudia Kehoe.

Today, I stand before you with hope for the future of our state, determined to meet the challenges ahead.

Just over two weeks ago, I was humbled to be sworn in as the 58th Governor of Missouri.

My story is truly one of the American Dream. I am the son of a single mother, raised on hard work and faith—who, as a child, never knew if he would own his own bicycle, let alone serve as your governor.

And the historic makeup of this 103rd General Assembly reflects on the opportunities offered by this great state and nation. For the first time in history, a woman holds the title of Senate President Pro Tem: Senator Cindy O’Laughlin. And Speaker Jon Patterson is not only the first Kansas City-area legislator elected as Missouri House Speaker since before the Civil War, but he is also the first Asian American to lead in this Chamber. Since the Speaker is from Kansas City, as Coach Reid would say... *How ‘bout those Chiefs!*

I am told that I am the first Governor to serve our great state who was born and raised in the city of St. Louis by a singer mother.

And all of us got here today based on merit and hard work.

One of the last things my mentor, Dave Sinclair, told me was to “never forget my roots.”

He used to write notes at the dealership on paper plates. As I learned from him, I took up this practice—and I still do to this day, nearly 40 years later.

I share this because, throughout my years in this building, I have worked to follow Mr. Sinclair's advice—to always remember my roots and stay humble.

The relationships we build here and the way we treat people are far more important than any praise, headline, or viral social media moment. Missourians didn't send us here to work ourselves; we're here to serve them.

I said earlier that I will never forget my roots. Well, I've sat where you sit. I understand the pressures you face. And I want to work with you—not against you—because I believe we can only secure Missouri's future if we work together.

Any efforts we make to improve the lives of Missourians—whether it's expanding education opportunities, cutting taxes, or expanding childcare—none of it matters if Missourians aren't safe. Securing Missouri's future begins with public safety.

Achieving safety and security is not just a goal—it is the foundations of opportunity, stability, and progress. My administration committed to equipping law enforcement with the tools, training, and resources they need to succeed.

By focusing on both enforcement and prevention, Missouri will empower the brave men and women in uniform, enabling every Missourian to live, work, and simply walk through their neighborhoods without fear.

Before taking office, I promised Missourians I would take action on crime as soon as my hand left the Bible on Inauguration Day—and we did just that. We signed six executive orders developed based on input from law enforcement to launch our Safer Missouri initiative.

From organizing regional efforts to arrest dangerous fugitives to charging our state troopers to work with the Trump Administration and our federal partners in an effort to crack down on illegal immigration and establishing a statewide program that encourages communities to support law enforcement, these executive orders were our first step in a comprehensive, multi-phase plan.

But our work on day one was just the start. As I have said before, in the coming weeks, months, and years, our administration will be relentless in our pursuit to make Missouri a place where it's easier to be a cop than a criminal.

This includes supporting law enforcement recruitment and retention efforts.

In our budget, we are recommending funding to bolster the existing Missouri Blue Scholarship Program for law enforcement basic training. We're also recommending \$10 million in funding to assist local communities who prioritize public safety with equipment and training needs through our Blue Shield Program.

We're also supporting legislation to create a new scholarship for law enforcement to access postsecondary education outside of basic training, to assist with recruitment and retention efforts.

When we support law enforcement officers, we must also support their families. I urge the General Assembly to pass legislation from Representative Stinnett and Senator Ben Brown extending professional licensing reciprocity for spouses of law enforcement that move to Missouri from another state.

And, we're adding \$2.5 million to the budget to support the sheriff's retirement system for another year.

Our budget also supports funding for a new crime lab in Cape Girardeau, serving the Missouri State Highway Patrol Troop E region.

These steps are critical to making Missouri the best state in the nation to be a law enforcement officer.

Today, there is a lack of hope in many areas of our state, especially in our large metropolitan areas. Many of you know my story. I grew up in North St. Louis City. My old neighborhood was never perfect, but in my younger years, I could still safely walk the streets.

Young people in my old neighborhood—and across our state—now feel like they must turn to violence and gangs to survive. I have walked the streets of my childhood homes in Walnut Park and Baden and spoken to these young people. They simply believe there is no other option. They don't know what opportunities exist outside of the violence and crime that plagues their communities.

This lack of hope and pattern of behavior has taken too many lives and livelihoods of Missourians. It's unacceptable – and we're taking action.

As part of our Safer Missouri crime plan, I am urging the General Assembly to pass a comprehensive crime bill sponsored by Senators Fitzwater and Schroer, and Representative Christ.

We're going to increase penalties for crimes like violent rioting and fleeing in a vehicle and we're going to crack down on criminals who participate in reckless stunt driving and street racing, which have damaged property and taken lives for far too long.

This legislation also includes increasing oversight and accountability of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department.

The current status quo in St. Louis is unacceptable. As the economic powerhouse of our state, we cannot continue to let crime kill growth in the region and drive businesses and families to move outside of our state's borders.

In St. Louis, we have one of the nation's top police chiefs in Chief Robert Tracy, and a tough on crime prosecutor in St. Louis Circuit Attorney Gabe Gore. They could do even more if we give them the tools they need to continue their success.

Our major cities—St. Louis, Kansas City, Columbia, and Springfield—can only survive with business investment and we have to be honest where we stand on crime.

The days of political and subjective statistics are done under my administration. The polling data I care about is whether or not a business feels safe enough to invest in our cities. That's the barometer. Period.

It's one thing for elected officials to say they support law enforcement and strengthening public safety, but I hope you will join me in showing support for law enforcement and the businesses creating jobs in our stat with real action.

A shocking statistic that isn't talked about enough, is that fentanyl is the leading cause of death for Americans between the ages of 18 and 45. It has destroyed far too many lives and families. We will tackle the fentanyl crisis in Missouri.

Today, we're joined by Lizzy and Hal Schott from Wildwood, Missouri. Over the summer, I had the privilege of meeting Lizzy, and hearing how this crisis has impacted her family. In tears, she shared that her son, Keenan, tragically passed away at the young age of 30 on July 19, 2021. Keenan passed from fentanyl toxicity.

Keenan was loved by many. A graduate from Truman State University with honors, he worked and owned his own home. Like many young people today, he struggled with mental health issues and was introduced to fentanyl in an effort to self-medicate and feel better.

Since Keenan's passing, Lizzy has dedicated her time and efforts to educating others on the deadly consequences of fentanyl.

Please join me in recognizing Lizzy Schott for all she does to spread awareness and honor her son's memory.

If a drug dealer sells fentanyl that kills a Missourian, they should be charged with first degree murder. Period.

I urge the legislature to take action on this and support Senator Schroer and Representative Keathley's efforts, in honor of all those lost to this tragic epidemic.

In an effort to identify areas of high fentanyl use in schools across the state, we are including \$4 million in investment for fentanyl testing in wastewater systems at schools. This is a \$2 million increase since last year.

Sadly, much of this crisis is coming from our nation's southern border. Last year, I had the privilege of going to the border twice to see the work of our Missouri National Guard and Missouri State Highway Patrol in Texas. Every state is truly a border state.

Missouri will work with President Trump to crack down on illegal immigration and the deadly drugs and criminals that have flooded through our borders.

Crime, illegal immigration, and drugs—these are the things that threaten the success of Missourians. But we have fantastic partners who are committed to working to get these priorities accomplished.

In the upper gallery, the team who helped craft our Safer Missouri initiative are with us today. These individuals represent every sector of law enforcement, from police officers and state troopers to police chiefs and sheriffs. This group worked with my team, Attorney General Andrew Bailey, and members of the General Assembly to put our vision into tangible action.

Would our Safer Missouri crime plan group please stand to be recognized?

I also want to recognize all members of law enforcement and first responders, past and present with us here today... Would you please stand to be recognized?

Thank you for your service and sacrifice to our state. My administration will always have your backs.

While public safety is priority number one for Missourians to prosper, we must also have a robust economy and aggressive economic development efforts.

We're going to work hard to retain and recruit businesses here in Missouri. From manufacturers, to retailer, to Missouri's sports teams, these businesses, who provide jobs and opportunities to Missourians, are an important part of our state's economic success.

As a small businessman and entrepreneur who has created hundreds of jobs, I'm excited to get to work securing investment and growth in our state.

That's why we support legislation to extend the Deal Closing Fund, sponsored by Senator Bernskoetter and Representative Knight, as a continued tool for our economic development teams.

Infrastructure and economic development go hand in hand. While there has been significant investment in infrastructure in recent years, including the expansion of I-70 and multiple bridge projects, we are including a reappropriation of last year's \$100 million for rural road improvements in this year's budget to ensure all those funds are invested in rural infrastructure.

In order to compete with other states, we must focus on reducing taxes and cutting regulations, so families keep more of their own money, and so job creators look at our state to expand and hire more hard-working Missourians.

It won't be easy. It will take time, but I have directed the Missouri Department of Revenue to work with my staff on a sustainable and comprehensive plan to eliminate the individual income tax once and for all.

We are committed to this goal. While we task our best and brightest with developing a responsible plan to eliminate the income tax, the legislature must continue with the success we've seen from cutting taxes so far.

So, I ask you to work with us on this effort and add additional Senate Bill 509 style income tax cut triggers this session.

Missourians can spend their money a whole lot better than government, and I hope you will work with me to help Missouri families secure a better future for themselves...a future with no income taxes.

In addition to tax cuts, I hope the legislature will send substantial tort reform to my desk this session. Under this administration, we will not let frivolous lawsuits and litigation crush economic growth.

As many of you have heard me say before, a strong early childhood system is necessary for a prosperous economy. We know that when investing in our children, we are not only preparing them to be ready for school and to be successful later in life; we are also helping the workforce today.

When parents have a safe and reliable place to take their children and know that they are taken care of, they are able to focus on their work and make our communities and economy even stronger.

This is personal to me. My mother worked hard to support my siblings and me. When one of us got sick, she had to make a choice: either leave us at home alone or go to work to pay for our groceries that week. No parent, especially a single mother, should ever have to make that decision.

The biggest challenge to the childcare crisis is getting more teachers in early childhood classrooms and addressing the current regulatory environment.

To be successful, we need commitments from the local and state levels, from public and private partners working together, to find ways to expand access to quality child care in every community across the state.

Thanks to the work of advocates like Wendy Doyle at United WE, we know the administrative burden and complexities involved in licensing a child care program. Missouri must do better.

While there are certainly a number of requirements needed to keep kids safe, we can do a better job of making regulations easier to understand, implement, and comply with.

Today I will be issuing an executive order charging the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education-Office of Childhood with a complete re-write of the child care regulations to make them easier to understand and navigate.

They will also find ways to cut the existing regulations substantially, and I mean substantially... all while keeping kids safe. I expect a plan for this to be completed in months, not years.

While the state can't carry the entire burden of this issue, we can be a partner alongside families, employers, and child care providers. We must provide a viable path for businesses who want to offer childcare as a fringe benefit to their employees.

We are also including \$10 million in this year's budget to offer grant funding opportunities to support partnerships between employers, community partners, and the child care industry to make more child care slots available for Missouri families.

We have seen partnerships supported by these grants in recent history have great success.

Today, in the upper gallery, we are joined by Alena Malone with Lovely Child Development Center located in the City of Ferguson. Alena also serves as the Director of Saving our Children North County Resource Center, located in Bellefontaine Neighbors. She is joined by Assistant Director Theresa Hester.

Alena utilized the Innovation Grant to start up a childcare facility that serves 56 children in North St. Louis County. She is a passionate advocate for improving Missouri's child care system, and her work exemplifies the power of collaboration between employers and community partners.

Please join me in recognizing Alena for providing care and services to children in the city of Ferguson and Bellefontaine Neighbors and for her work to improve Missouri's child care industry.

My administration is committed to timely payments for the child care providers who partner with the state to provide care. We know delays in payments from the state have made it difficult for providers to even stay open.

So, starting in fiscal year 2026, providers will receive payments from the state at the beginning of the month and we will pay on enrollment – just like private pay. We will not allow late payments, or technology issues to put these small businesses at risk of not being able to provide for families in need of child care.

Together, we will secure a better environment for providers to thrive, and Missouri's children to be set up for success.

When those kids get older, they will have access to quality education, including career and technical education opportunities that prepare them for the workforce.

In Missouri, we get a lot right when it comes to career and technical education, but gaps remain, and we can do more to increase technical education to skill up our current and future workforce.

We're proposing \$15 million in new funding to address equipment, space, and operational needs of career and technical centers across the state, as well as \$5 million more on an annual basis to support increased operational costs.

Every student in Missouri should be able to talk to school counselors about their future career path, whether that includes college or not.

That's why we are proposing an increase of \$1 million in funding to expand career counseling to more high schools across the state.

But it's not all about funding, either. I will use this office, and call on the legislature to use their voices, to drive conversation and emphasize the importance of these programs.

I am announcing today that we have issued an additional executive order establishing the Governor's Workforce of the Future Challenge, instructing DESE to put a plan in place for better coordination among key stakeholders, including K-12 schools, local business and industry, and higher education to improve the state's career and technical education programs and infrastructure. Again, I expect this work to happen at business-speed, in months...not years.

By addressing critical needs of tax cuts for families, rural roads, childcare access, and career technical training, our budget priorities foster innovation, strengthen communities, and ensure that Missouri remains a competitive and thriving state for all.

Our hard-working agriculture families and their efforts are critical to Missouri's economic success. From multi-generational farmers and ranchers to first-generation farmers like Claudia and me, we must get government out of the way and let our farmers and ranchers do what they do best: work hard and continue to produce results.

Securing the future of agriculture also means investing in the next generation.

At the urging of Senator Black, our budget includes \$800,000 in permanent funding for Missouri FFA.

Seated in the upper gallery is Ms. Adeline Thessen. Addie grew up on her family's fifth-generation cattle and row crop farm in Taos.

Since a young age, she has always had a passion for agriculture. I know this because I bought several of her steers during her 16 plus years of involvement in FFA and 4-H.

She is a 2024 graduate of the University of Missouri's College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, where she found a passion for agronomy.

Today, Addie works in precision farming, specializing in product support for spray drones and precision equipment. Now, she is an operator and partial owner with her parents on their family farm. Addie also judges county and state livestock shows and helps local youth and their 4-H livestock projects.

She is a prime example of the future of agriculture.

Please join me in recognizing Addie and the Thessen family, even though I may have paid a little too much for those steers...

The Missouri State Fair is a tradition like no other in our state, and Claudia and I have been proud to support the Fair for many years now. It is the best display of agriculture and the future of our state's leading industry.

We're proposing a substantial investment in new bonding to support the construction of a 40,000 square foot covered multi-use livestock barn and 80,000 square foot stalling barn to house equine and other livestock at the Fair's the new arena, which was previously supported by the legislature and is now under construction.

As a businessman, I believe a return on investment is critical to any deal and thanks to the cooperation of the Missouri State Fair Commission, we expect their help to retire the bonds for this project with the revenues from this facility. Once fully operational, we expect these investments to pay for themselves by attracting more national and regional events and shows, bringing increased economic activity to Sedalia.

While Missouri agriculture has a \$93.7 billion economic impact in our state, there is still room to grow. As lieutenant governor, I was proud to work with education and agriculture stakeholders on the Missouri Food, Beverage and Forest Products Manufacturing Task Force, where we identified areas for future growth through value-added practices.

Our budget also includes funding to expand Missouri's meat and poultry inspection and production capacity, which will aid in minimizing delays for producers.

Under this administration, our ag industry will continue to grow and thrive because it is not only the backbone of our economy, but our producers feed and clothe the world.

Missouri farmers give back, too. Claudia and I are proud to participate in the Drive to Feed Kids each year at the Fair, held by Missouri Farmers Care. Since 2017, this event has provided over 13 million meals to Missouri children and families.

In partnership with the Missouri Department of Agriculture, Missouri Farmers Care is bringing this meal packing event to the State Capitol this session. I hope to see legislators join us in this effort to fight hunger in our state.

Would any elected official or guest here today who is in the production agriculture business please stand to be recognized?

We know that securing Missouri's future is only possible with a quality education for our children. Strengthening public education, expanding school choice, and empowering parents is critical to ensuring that every single student has the opportunity to get a world class education.

To expand school choice, I urge the General Assembly to pass voluntary open enrollment in public schools, sponsored by Senator Trent and Representative Pollitt.

We've also included \$50 million in general revenue funding to bolster the ESA program.

By adding state funding to the tax credit program we will be able to serve substantially more children than the program has in the past year.

We are proposing additional funding for charter schools to address capital improvement needs.

This year, we are recommending a \$200 million increase for the Foundation Formula, the largest increase since the current Formula was created. And, over \$370 million to fully fund the state's commitment for school transportation needs to support our hardworking teachers. Our budget includes \$33 million to fund teacher salaries. We've also included \$30 million for Small School Grants to support the continued success of our small rural school districts, the heartbeat of their communities.

You're going to hear it in the media, so you'll hear it from me first. While it's clear our support for K-12 education is a record investment and the largest we have ever seen, we are not fully funding the Foundation Formula.

While we are committed to making good on the funding commitments passed by the legislature last year, this budget does not include the additional \$300 million liability that was imposed by an administrative body.

I want to be clear that I am a proud supporter of education in all its forms—public schools, private schools, charter schools—as long as Missouri's children are getting a quality education. Throwing more money at the problem is not the solution. We have invested over \$4 billion in K-12 education and we still aren't seeing acceptable results across the state.

The Foundation Formula in its current form has gotten out of control. With funding requirements this body has implemented as well as changing educational needs across the state, we no longer feel the formula, as currently written, appropriately allocates funding for public education. We must find a solution that does a better job of incentivizing performance and managing unrealistic annual adjustments.

The current formula was written twenty years ago.

Since its inception, funding for the Foundation Formula has increased by nearly \$2 billion while enrollment has declined by nearly 30,000 students.

That is why today we are announcing that we have issued an additional executive order establishing the School Funding Modernization Task Force to recommend changes to better serve students and families.

We know that rewriting the Formula is a monumental task. It's about looking decades ahead, and not just the current needs of school districts. I urge those involved to keep that in mind so we can solve this problem for future generations of children.

We must modernize the way we fund education, while recognizing high performing schools and ensuring lower performing schools have a plan to do better.

We are also committed to ensuring we have the best qualified people in place to lead Missouri public and charter education. Former Missouri State Senator and current Commissioner Karla Eslinger is a fantastic start and I have committed to meeting regularly with the Commissioner and legislative leadership to move our vision of increased accountability for school performance and student outcomes forward.

But I want to be clear, this administration will not retain or appoint members of the State Board of Education who do not align with our vision.

As I've said before, we must commit to teaching our kids how to think not what to think. Because in Missouri, we educate, we do not indoctrinate.

In the classroom, common sense discipline is a must. Disrespect towards a teacher or other students is unacceptable. If we are teaching kids to be prepared to succeed in the workforce, respect, and discipline are a basic component.

We all agree that kids deserve to feel safe at school.

I am asking the General Assembly to pass legislation requiring applicable agencies to meet regularly to discuss school safety concerns, planning, and prevention efforts, sponsored by Senator Burger and Representative Chris Brown as well as legislation sponsored by Senator Henderson and Representative Allen that requires schools to report school safety incidents and threats to DESE so we can have better data on trends and occurrences.

These investments in public safety, economic development, education, and agriculture are made possible, in part by the work of dedicated public servants across the state...

As we built out our Cabinet, we chose leaders who will strive to work at business-speed, keeping efficiency and effective practices at top of mind in everything we do— a Cabinet that works for you.

In an effort to build on our vision for state government, I have directed these leaders to spend dedicated time each month reviewing regulations, their necessity, and ways to reduce their regulatory burden. I look forward to working with these men and women, and the nearly 49,000 hardworking state team members in the years ahead.

Would the members of the Cabinet please stand to be recognized for all you do on behalf of the people of Missouri?

We have made much progress on supporting our state workforce in recent years, but more is needed.

As any businessperson will understand, we must keep up with the market to retain and recruit a talented workforce. Right now, it's extremely difficult for our agencies to operate efficiently with an average turnover rate of 20 percent in our state workforce. That's why we are proposing a statewide retention pay plan increase for state employees for every two years of service to the state with a cap of twenty years of service. State employees working in 24/7 facilities that already have this time of service pay plan will receive a cost-of-living adjustment.

Finally, I will say this... this administration will be built on merit, and we will not support DEI programs in state government. I will be taking action on this in the coming weeks...

As we are seeing a national movement to reduce the size of government and focus on efficient practices, I hope to see the same in Missouri.

You won't find this in the budget currently, as it's a work in progress, but I am working with House and Senate leadership to ensure Missouri has its own version of a DOGE government efficiency initiative very soon—a Show-Me DOGE, if you will...

Our Missouri DOGE will have an immediate return on investment, as we will ask industry experts from around the state to donate their time to assist our state agencies in the areas of their expertise. For every dollar we invest in this, we will ask that they invest the same in their time and efforts.

We cannot secure a brighter future for our state without a functioning and efficient state government that serves Missouri families well.

Because this is why we are all here—to be a voice for families, children, and those who can't speak for themselves. That includes the unborn.

In our state, we value a culture of life. We treasure our families.

Regardless of how you voted on Amendment 3, Missouri has so much more to offer women. In Missouri, there are better, safer choices than abortion, and we are committed to helping pregnant women know these exist, including the incredible Pregnancy Resource Centers across the state.

We're asking the General Assembly to support alternatives to abortion with 4 million dollars in additional funding to benefit expecting and new mothers. That's a more than 50% increase to existing services.

Let's work together to support Missouri women so abortion doesn't even have to be considered an option.

Working together...It's what we must do to accomplish these goals and a better Missouri.

It won't be easy. The politics of today's world tells us that we can't work together, and that consensus is just not possible. But I have built a life and a career on doing just that, without sacrificing my core, Christian, conservative beliefs.

Because it's not just about us. Our work in this building is only possible because of those who came before us: the sacrifices of our brave service men and women.

That is why we are proposing an additional \$10 million of general revenue funding to our Missouri Veterans Homes. Under the Kehoe Administration, no veterans home will close due to a lack of state funding.

In the Chamber with us today, we are honored to have the Commanding Officer of the USS Missouri, Commander Andrews, and crew members Senior Chief Weaver and Petty Officer Schmidt – who is from Nixa, Missouri. Missourians thank you for all you do to keep our country safe and honor Missouri's namesake Naval ship. Would you please stand to be recognized?

Now, would any other US military veterans or active duty members please stand to be recognized? Please join me in thanking these men and women for their service.

So, to the members of the General Assembly, I look forward to working with you in this first session that I have the privilege of serving as your Governor.

I promise I will never “forget my roots” and I will work with you, just as I have in this building for years.

My friend, and United States Senator Roy Blunt often told a story of a statue, that stood in our Nation's Capitol for over 100 years, who no one knew the name of. He told this story because it's not about your name or who you are when you are a public servant.

Senator Blunt said, “What we do here is more important than who we are.”

I try to live by that today, and I hope the members in this chamber will as well.

Because I believe the budget and legislative priorities we outlined today will be a first step in securing an even safer, stronger, and more prosperous Missouri!

May God bless you. May God bless the United States of America. And may God continue to bless the great State of Missouri!